

#### What is the community challenge?

OnTrack Greenville middle schools located in the White Horse Community of Greenville County, South Carolina serve a higher proportion of low-income and minority students than other middle schools in the district. Overall, students attending these four schools have placed behind their peers in key academic measures of attendance, behavior, and course performance. These early warning indicators of disengagement in middle school are connected to increased risks of high school dropout (Balfanz & Fox, 2011).

#### Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund  
Intervention: Teen Leadership  
Subgrantee: Greenville County Schools  
Intermediary: United Way of Greenville County  
Focus Area: Youth Development  
Focus Population: Middle school youth  
Community Served: White Horse Community of Greenville County, SC

#### What is the promising solution?

In order to help students improve behavior and stay on track toward on-time graduation, Greenville County Schools offered the Teen Leadership course. The Teen Leadership curriculum targets middle school students to support leadership development and character education. It focuses on helping students learn appropriate social skills and develop important personal attributes and behaviors, like self-confidence and public speaking.

#### What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Greenville County Schools' Teen Leadership program by The Riley Institute at Furman University began in 2016 and finished reporting in 2019. An implementation evaluation examined model fidelity and provided feedback for quality improvement. To assess if students who participated in Teen Leadership demonstrated improved behavior, the impact study utilized a single-site, non-randomized group design with groups formed by propensity score matching. Treatment students were matched to: (1) other students in the treatment schools who did not participate in Teen Leadership; (2) other students in the same school district; and (3) to other students attending Title I schools across the state of South Carolina.

#### What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, United Way of Greenville County engaged an independent evaluator to conduct an impact and implementation evaluation of the Teen Leadership course. Key findings include:

- Greenville County Schools implemented the Teen Leadership course structure with a high degree of fidelity, with teachers making minor modifications to the curriculum.
- Across different years of the study and comparison groups, Teen Leadership students generally served fewer hours of in-school suspensions than matched comparison students. Teen Leadership students also had higher SC READY - ELA test scores and had higher average daily attendance than matched comparison students in the same district.
- Student survey results found that Teen Leadership students reported having stronger relationships with adults and teachers at school than matched comparison students in the same district, a secondary outcome of the course.

## Notes on the evaluation

A notable limitation of this study is that researchers did not have the ability to assess if comparison students at district and state schools had received similar program services, such as other character education programs or interventions. In addition, the treatment schools simultaneously were implementing formal and informal school-wide initiatives to improve student behavior. These school-wide efforts were confounding factors that may explain the lack of significant effects when comparing Teen Leadership students to in-school matched comparison students. These school-wide efforts also increased the likelihood that the positive significant effects of the program identified when examining district school matches may not be fully attributable to the Teen Leadership program.

## How is Greenville County Schools using the evaluation findings to improve?

During the course of implementation, lessons emerged regarding several aspects of the program, including the need for effective teacher support and collaboration, relevance of specific examples within the Teen Leadership curriculum, and factors needed for successful implementation of evaluation processes. The report details planned changes based on these learnings. Due to student interest in the course, district leaders created three levels of Teen Leadership, allowing students to continue building leadership and social skills over multiple semesters. Local leaders have committed to funding the initiative and evaluation for the final two years of the project in the absence of Social Innovation Fund continuation funding; therefore, evaluation next steps include the continuation of data collection and analysis as planned for academic years 2018-19 and 2019-20. Evaluators will examine the impact of participating in multiple levels of Teen Leadership and will include additional qualitative data collection activities in future years of the study.

### Evaluation At-a-Glance

**Evaluation Design:** Single-site non-randomized group design with groups formed by propensity score matching

**Study Population:** Middle school youth

**Independent Evaluator:** The Riley Institute at Furman University and RTI International

**This Evaluation's Level of Evidence\*:** Moderate

\*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.